





# *(Mis)Understanding the Balkans*

*Essays in Honour of Raymond Detrez*



Edited by Michel De Dobbeleer & Stijn Vervaet

2013



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Cover design: Gitte Callaert

(Mis)Understanding the Balkans. Essays in Honour of Raymond Detrez  
Michel De Dobbeleer & Stijn Vervaeke (eds.)  
Gent, Academia Press, 2013, 456 pp.

ISBN 978 90 382 2267 7  
D/2013/4804/275  
U 2125

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## Preface

In October 2013, Mon Detrez retired as a professor of East European History in the Department of Languages and Cultures, section Slavonic and East European Studies, at Ghent University. He has introduced many generations of students to the history of Russia and to the culture, literature and history of Central Europe and the Balkans, the latter being his favourite topic both as a teacher and as a researcher.

Both of us came to know Mon first as a gifted teacher, a born storyteller who, especially in his courses on the Balkans, captivated the audience from the first until the last sentence, tackled his subject with humour (but did not treat it as a joke) and peppered his classes with anecdotes, be it on Peter the Great's escapades in the Low Countries, the wardrobe of Polish Sarmatism or vampire(-slayer)s in the Balkans. Later on, we got to know him as an outstanding scholar who covered a wide range of topics and whose sharp-witted analyses were always grounded in an in-depth knowledge of the broader linguistic, cultural and historical context surrounding his subject matter.

As a scholar who examines the cultural history of South-Eastern Europe with a critical eye, he has received international acclaim, in particular for his study of nation-building and (pre-)national collective identities on the Balkans. The broader public in Belgium and the Netherlands, on the other hand, has known him as the specialist who not only comments in the news on 'the situation on the Balkans', but has also published a number of books in Dutch (on nationalism in the Balkans, on the dissolution of Yugoslavia, about the recent past of Kosovo and Macedonia) accessible to a wider readership but always written with scholarly rigour. Most, if not all of these, have not only served as a bible for journalists writing on the former Yugoslavia, but also deserve credit as an attempt to do away with the still-existing prejudices on the Balkans. The older among us will probably remember Mon as a radio-maker (with his well-tempered voice and perfect diction) who, in the heyday of *Radio 3*, covered topics ranging from Renaissance poetry in Dubrovnik to Serbian folk music or contemporary Bulgarian literature. Finally, he has also translated a lot, especially poetry and prose fiction from the Bulgarian, Serbo-Croat and Slovene.

This *Festschrift* not only tries to reflect the wide array of topics on which Mon Detrez has conducted research, but also consists, as a true *liber amicorum*, of articles written by his friends. It is divided into three sections, which (to a lesser or greater extent) have been at the heart of his research:

- (1) historical approaches to (pre-)national collective identities on the Balkans
- (2) linguistic approaches to (national) identity
- (3) the image of Eastern Europe in the West and vice versa in literature and culture

We would like to extend a warm thank you to those who in one way or another have helped to bring matters to a happy conclusion: to the authors who have contributed to this volume, to Inge Claerhout and Thomas Langerak – our partners in crime in the conspiracy called ‘Mon’s farewell celebration’ –, to Maja Boejojekliëva and her students as well as to Dieter De Bruyn and Ronald Commers for their contribution to the aforementioned festive event, and to our publisher Pieter Borghart for his patience and assistance in editorial work.

Michel De Dobbeleer & Stijn Vervaeke,  
Ghent, 11 November 2013

# Table of Contents

AAN RAYMOND	
<i>Maja Boejeckliëva</i> .....	1
<b>PART 1: (PRE-)NATIONAL IDENTITIES ON THE BALKANS</b> .....	<b>3</b>
HET MILLET-SYSTEEM IN DE BALKAN; EEN MODEL VOOR HET EUROPA VAN VANDAAG?	
<i>Katlijn Malfliet</i> .....	5
PAISII HILENDARSKI: CIVIL AND ETHNIC CONCEPTIONS OF 'IMAGINED COMMUNITIES' IN A PRE-NATIONALISTIC CONTEXT	
<i>Vassilis Maragos</i> .....	19
THESSALONIKI AND THE CITIES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT	
<i>Paschalis M. Kitromilides</i> .....	35
BULGARIAN PATRIARCHS AND BULGARIAN NEOPHANARIOTES: CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE DURING THE AGE OF REVOLUTION	
<i>Dimitris Stamatopoulos</i> .....	45
HET FILHELLEENSE NETWERK VAN PRINS LEOPOLD VAN SAKSEN-COBURG; IOANNIS CAPODISTRIAS EN DE GRIEKSE OPSTAND VAN 1821-1830 IN EEN EUROPEES PERSPECTIEF	
<i>Gita Deneckere</i> .....	59
NATIONAL IDENTITY AS A GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY: THE BULGARIAN NATION-BUILDING PROCESS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	
<i>Dessislava Lilova</i> .....	75
БЪЛГАРСКА КАТОЛИЧЕСКА ИСТОРИОГРАФИЯ ОТ СРЕДАТА НА XIX В.: МЕЖДУ СВЕТСКОТО И ДУХОВНОТО	
<i>Рая Заимова</i> .....	87
FALLMERAYER AND DRAGOMIS ON THE GREEK NATION AND ITS MISSION	
<i>Gunnar De Boel</i> .....	97
MACEDOINE 1908-1918: LE RENVERSEMENT D'UN PARADIGME?	
<i>Bernard Lory</i> .....	109

THE CHALLENGE OF THE OTTOMAN LEGACY: YUGOSLAV NATION-BUILDING AND SOUTH SLAV MUSLIM TOGETHERNESS IN INTERWAR YUGOSLAVIA <i>Pieter Troch</i> .....	123
<b>PART 2: LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY</b> .....	<b>135</b>
EIN SOZIOHISTORISCHER MODELLENTWURF DES BALKANSPRACHBUNDS <i>Dieter Stern</i> .....	137
ACTS OF IDENTITY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF TURKISH PLURALS <i>Victor A. Friedman</i> .....	157
BILINGUALE SPRECHERSTRATEGIEN UND SÜDSLAWISCH-GRIECHISCHES CODESWITCHING IM RAUM FLORINA <i>Christian Voss</i> .....	171
LA LANGUE ET L'IDENTITE ETHNIQUE: LES CAS BALKANIQUES <i>Petya Asenova</i> .....	193
HOE HOORT HET EN WAT HOOR JE? HET PROBLEEM VAN DE STANDAARDNORM IN HET NIEUWE KROATISCH-NEDERLANDSE WOORDENBOEK <i>Radovan Lučić &amp; Wim Honselaar</i> .....	203
NEIL YOUNG'S 'POWDERFINGER' (1979, 1991): A NARRATIVE WHICH CONTESTS THE NATION'S VALUES <i>Stef Slembrouck</i> .....	223
ЭТНИЧЕСКАЯ И ЯЗЫКОВАЯ СИТУАЦИЯ В ОДЕССКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ УКРАИНЫ В ПРОШЛОМ И НАСТОЯЩЕМ <i>Алексей В. Юдин</i> .....	237
Отражение транскультурной идентичности в поэтике Андрея Макина <i>Giulia Gigante</i> .....	257
<b>PART 3: THE IMAGE OF EASTERN EUROPE IN THE WEST AND VICE VERSA</b> .....	<b>257</b>
LAWLESS, FORBIDDEN AND ABOMINABLE CUSTOMS: <i>О ЛАТИНЬХЪ СИРЬЧЬ ФРОУГОХЪ</i> , A SLAVONIC LIST OF LATIN ERRORS <i>Lara Sels</i> .....	271
L'IMAGE DE L' 'AUTRE' DANS LES TEXTES DES VOYAGEURS GRECS A TRAVERS LES BALKANS AUX XVIIIE-XVIIIIE SIECLES <i>Nadia Danova</i> .....	289
IS DMITRIJ INSAROV EEN IMAGINAIRE BULGAAR? OVER SCHEPPINGEN VAN TURGENEV EN DETREZ <i>Michel De Dobbeleer</i> .....	299

“ALLES GEBEURT NU TEN BATE VAN DE SLAVEN”: LEV TOLSTOJ EN FJODOR DOSTOJEVSKI OVER HET PANSLAVISME <i>Nel Grillaert</i> .....	309
ALEKO KONSTANTINOV AND THE RECEPTION OF HIS <i>BAY GANYO</i> <i>Roumen Daskalov</i> .....	321
FASHIONING LEGACIES OF AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN RULE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: THE CANONISATION OF PETAR KOČIĆ <i>Stijn Vervae</i> .....	337
“IN BALKAN-IDIOMEN DURCHEINANDER SCHWATZEN”: THOMAS MANN, DE BALKANCLICHÉS EN DE <i>BILDUNGSBÜRGERLICHE KONVERSATIONSLEXIKA</i> IN HUN OORDELEN OVER DE BALKANVOLKEREN <i>Luc De Grauwe</i> .....	351
JOEGOSLAVIË, EEN ONVERENIGBAARHEID VAN (VOLKS)KARAKTERS: MARCEL CORDEMANS’ ANALYSE VAN DE LEVENSVATBAARHEID VAN JOEGOSLAVIË <i>Jelica Novaković-Lopušina</i> .....	365
ELISAVETA BAGRJANA EN NIKOLAJ KUNTSJEV: HERINNERINGEN AAN HET BULGAARSE LITERAIRE LEVEN (1981-1999) <i>Jan Paul Hinrichs</i> .....	375
К ВОПРОСУ О ХАЗАРСКО-ЕВРЕЙСКОМ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОМ НАРРАТИВЕ В РОССИЙСКОЙ МИФО- КУЛЬТУРЕ: ИСТОРИОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ ЗАМЕТКИ <i>Денис Иоффе</i> .....	385
GEOCENTRISME – HELIOCENTRISME – ETNOCENTRISME: HET DEBAT OVER DE NATIONALITEIT VAN COPERNICUS <i>Idesbald Goddeeris</i> .....	405
RUSSIAN REFRACTIONS OF SPANISH ‘NATIONAL SOUL’: KONSTANTIN BAL’MONT AND THE POETICS OF VITALISM <i>Eric Metz</i> .....	419
DIE “GLÄSERNE STADT” ALS METAPHER FÜR DEUTSCHLAND: NATASCHA WODINS RUSSLANDERFAHRUNG <i>Emmanuel Waegemans</i> .....	431
LOOKING AT CENTRAL EUROPE, AND LOOKING BACK AT WESTERN EUROPE: A PHILOSOPHICAL REMARK <i>Rik Pinxten</i> .....	437
<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b> .....	<b>445</b>
<b>TABULA GRATULATORIA</b> .....	<b>453</b>





## Aan Raymond

Er was eens in een zonnig land  
een vreemde jonge man met baard...  
(Precies een prins, maar zonder paard.)  
Hij kruiste mijn studentenpad...  
Hij kende keurig Oudbulgaars,  
ik werd verliefd: o, mama, papa, sorry!

### En zo begon the story...

Eerst was er de Geschiedenis van Bulgarije  
(en de geboorte van prins Stefan),  
dan van de Balkan, dan van Hongarije,  
van Kosovo en van Centraal-Europa...  
Nog vóór de Geschiedenis van Rusland  
werd hij een blijde, trotse opa  
van twee exotische prinsesjes:  
het ene Melanie genaamd, het andere Danae.

En zoveel zomers zonken weg  
en zoveel jaren...

En ik beloop nog steeds hetzelfde pad  
met deze man, nu zonder (grijze) baard,  
bewonderend, beminnend en begrijpend...  
En echt van harte hopen op een

gelukkige en neverending story!

Maja Panajotova Boejoekliëva